



January 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

***May grace and peace be yours in abundance (1 Peter 1:2a).***

I send you greetings in the Name of the One who is the light of the world, Jesus our Lord, as you gather for your Annual General Congregational Meeting.

When you gather together, know that I am filled with gratitude to God for you; that I am thankful for our partnership in the gospel; and, that you continue to be in my prayers as I know I remain in yours.

When you meet together, you will be making decisions about your priorities for ministry. You will be adopting budgets that enable ministry that joins in God's mission in the world. You will be supporting your partners in ministry – the rostered leaders of this Synod, and especially those who serve among you as they, first and foremost, seek to equip you for the work of ministry: the building up of the Body of Christ.

Joining God's mission means that your ministry is among the people with whom you live and move and have your being. Your ministry is done each day in relationships with your neighbours through your words and deeds and the living out of your baptismal identity as God's beloved children.

Ministry continues beyond the neighborhood and congregation through the many faces of the Church and many facets of its ministries: our Synod and its staff, our National Church expression, the Lutheran World Federation, *En Misión con El Salvador: In Mission with El Salvador*, and our Companion Synod – The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia.

At Conference Gatherings in October 2016, Synod Council shared what they have been hearing across our Synod through the two Participating in Hope gatherings in 2015 and 2016, and in the Synod Convention 2016 conversations and sharing. Synod Council gathered all the comments together and have expressed what was heard in four statements. These, along with comments received at the Conference Gatherings, will be further explored at Synod Council's March 2017 retreat and you can expect to receive correspondence from Synod Council soon after the retreat to update and inform you.

The four statements:

*We are hearing you are desiring connection and relationship to experience God's love among us all.*

*You are eager to risk and test new ways but are concerned about how, and want to ensure we keep our essentials.*

*You want practical help in discerning what God is up to because you sense God is at work and present in so many ways.*

*This sense of God's acting presence is creating renewed desire to be communities of God's hope-filled people.*

Perhaps at this year's Annual General Meeting you might reflect on these four statements and our partnership together, as well as name and give thanks for the gifts and mission into which God has

invited you and your congregation. Consider taking a few moments in small groups to listen to each other and then share with all gathered reflections on the following (I would be pleased to receive your comments in writing to forward to Synod Council):

- 1) In what way(s) do these four statements reflect our community of faith?
- 2) If we could make three wishes for the future of our Synod what would they be?
- 3) Share about a time or situation when you or your congregation experienced God's love.
- 4) What resources do you have within your community? Share three gifts God has given you.

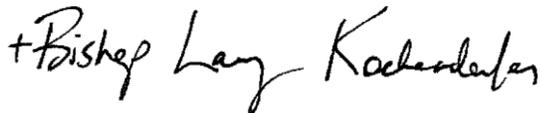
As you meet, you might also prayerfully consider forwarding a tithe (1/10<sup>th</sup>) of your annual income as a congregation, as your minimal offering for Benevolence for the ministry of the Synod and through the Synod to the wider Church. Some congregations have exceeded this mark already, but I would encourage all congregations to set this goal.

And remember Paul's words to the saints in Philippi: *...sisters and brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).*

My prayer is that your gathering will be a recital of gratitude and praise to God for the signs of the Holy Spirit at work in, through, around, and among you.

***The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).***

In Christ Jesus-  
Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bishop Larry Kochendorfer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop  
Synod of Alberta and the Territories  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada